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SUBJECT: KIRKUK: TENSE, RETURNING TO NORMAL, BUT NO RESUMPTION OF
COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

REF: Baghdad 2423

THIS IS A PRT KIRKUK REPORTING CABLE

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Over the past two weeks, ethnic relations in Kirkuk have been buffeted by the passage - and subsequent veto - of a controversial provincial elections law in Baghdad, a terrorist attack at a Kurdish demonstration resulting in mass casualties, a violent confrontation between Kurdish demonstrators and the Iraqi Turkoman Front (ITF), and a Provincial Council (PC) resolution passed by the Kurdish bloc threatening to join Kirkuk province to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Despite these events, Kirkuk remains generally stable and calm with no immediate threat of large-scale communal violence. Arab and Turkomen politicians have entered into an informal alliance against the Kurds. While Kurdish decisions to organize the July 28 demonstration and pass the resolution on the Regions Law were perceived as provocative by the other ethnic groups in the province, they are generally perceived as political maneuvers meant to influence negotiations in Baghdad on the elections law. END SUMMARY.

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Personal Ties Endure as Community Attitudes Harden
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¶2. (SBU) While rhetoric over the veto of the elections law has sometimes been heated, personal interactions between members of the different ethnic blocs at the Kirkuk Government Building (KGB) remain normal and even friendly. PRT members have observed Kurdish and Arab Provincial Council (PC) members joking with each other over the prospect of the implementation of the Regions Law in Kirkuk. Leaders of all ethnic groups are speaking out against violence, and asking for calm from their constituents. The PC meeting on 5 August saw all blocs represented and proceeded normally, with no apparent anger or difficulty.

¶3. (SBU) While it is nearly business as usual at the KGB, a media battle is underway in Kirkuk between Kurd and Turkoman media outlets. There are few Arab-specific media outlets in Kirkuk, and no true independent media. Turkomen television stations, such as Turkmeneli, present stories about Kirkuk with a Turkomen and Arab bias, while Kurdish media outlets do the same for the Kurds. Biased media coverage in Kirkuk contributes to ethnic tension, but to date there has been no communal violence stemming directly from media coverage, and we are working to improve media skills and discourage inflammatory reporting.

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Kurdish Political Tactics Provoke Other Communities
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¶4. (SBU) Arab and Turkomen contacts blame the Kurds for increased tension in Kirkuk over the past two weeks by organizing the 28 July

demonstration that led to the attack on ITF headquarters and, a few days later while tensions in the city were still elevated, by having the Kurdistan Brotherhood List (KBL - Kurdish bloc on the PC) call a special PC meeting on 31 July to pass a resolution threatening to implement the Regions Law in Kirkuk -- essentially threatening to join the KRG. Subsequent PRT meetings with Kurdish PC members confirm that both of these events were calculated political moves, approved by the KRG leadership in Erbil, to influence the negotiations over the elections law in Baghdad, but they were perceived by Kirkuk's Arab and Turkomen communities as direct threats.

15. (SBU) A key goal for the Kurds in Kirkuk is to prevent Iraqi Army (IA) battalions from central and southern Iraq from entering Kirkuk. Provincial leaders believe the current security situation in Kirkuk is calm, and that sufficient IA and Iraqi Police (IP) are present to maintain this peace (with which we and MND-N agree). Kurdish leaders argue that IA battalions from the South will raise tensions in the province, but they clearly believe that such moves would also undermine Kurdish authority in the province. Kirkuk PC Chairman Rizgar Ali (PUK) and PC member Mohammed Kamal (KDP) raised the issue of IA deployments with Iraqi Minister of Defense (MOD) Abdul Qadir during his visit to Kirkuk on 05 August. Abdul Qadir reportedly said, "we have no intention to send extra troops into Kirkuk. Kirkuk has more troops than it needs right now."

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Turkomen Fearful for Security
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16. (SBU) Turkomen leaders in Kirkuk have established an informal political alliance with Arab leaders to prevent Kirkuk from joining the KRG, believing that if Kirkuk were to join the KRG, both

communities would be marginalized. In meetings with the PRT, both Turkomen and Arab PC members denounced the KBL's threat to implement the Regions Law, but both blocs appear to believe that this was a political maneuver meant to influence negotiations in Baghdad. Tahseen Kahea (ITF) said, in a 04 August meeting, that the implementation of the Regions Law was "only a political ruse, rather than a petition to join the KRG."

17. (SBU) The Turkomen and Arabs have much in common politically, but the Turkomen are more fearful about security conditions in Kirkuk city, especially following the July 28 mob violence at ITF headquarters. This incident left several dead (both Kurd and Turkomen), and led to the detention of at least nine ITF members. The details of this altercation are still under investigation, with both sides blaming the other for initiating the violence. Turkomen leaders are proponents of bringing IA battalions from the South into Kirkuk, along with the establishment of a more prominent Coalition Forces (CF) presence in the city. The Turkomen heavily backed the vetoed version of the provincial elections law, and stood to benefit disproportionately from the "32 percent" representational proposal. (Most estimates are that Turkomen make up no more than 12 percent of Kirkuk province's population.)

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Arab Kirkukis Less Threatened, but Aligned with Turkomen Against Kurds
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18. (SBU) Arab leaders in Kirkuk province are much more focused on the elections law than the Turkomen, and less on security, perhaps because Arab Kirkukis mostly live on the edge of the city and in the countryside. Top Arab politicians, particularly Deputy Governor Rakan Saeed, and PC member Mohammed Khalil, appear to be in regular, direct contact with members of the Council of Representative (CoR). Rakan even claimed he was the author of the controversial Article 24 on Kirkuk's future status. Over the past two weeks, Arab leaders from Kirkuk have made several trips to Baghdad to meet with different CoR blocs - particularly ISCI, whom they hope will join with the Sunni groups on the Kirkuk issue. The Arabs are proponents of bringing in IA troops from outside the province, just as they warmly welcomed efforts to establish what is now a predominantly Arab IA/IP presence in the Arab area of Hawija. Arab Kirkukis favored the "32 percent" proposal, but appear willing to settle for a balanced ethnic split of the top three positions in the province

(Governor, Deputy Governor, and PC Chairman if they can get a guarantee that Kirkuk will never join the KRG.

19. (SBU) COMMENT: Ethnic tensions in Kirkuk province seem to have been managed following the July 28 violence. Leaders of all ethnic groups have publicly called for calm, and have specifically avoided statements that might inflame the public. Arab and Turkomen leaders appear to perceive the KBL's threat over the Regions Law as a political maneuver, rather than a serious threat to imminently pull Kirkuk into the KRG. PC Chairman Rizgar Ali, at the 05 August PC meeting, emphasized that Kirkuk was not joining the KRG now, which may help to calm fears. While the threat of violence in Kirkuk has been reduced, another violent incident in Kirkuk or political breakdown in Baghdad could reawaken ethnic animosities. END COMMENT

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